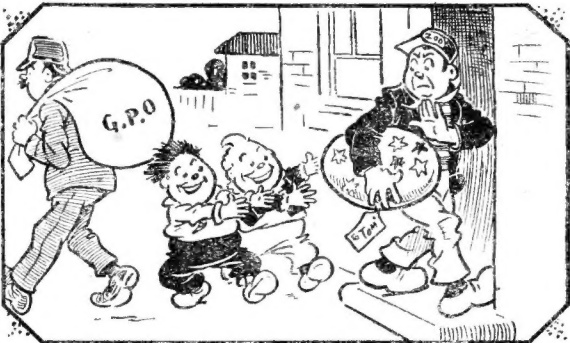


Comic Cuts 1^D

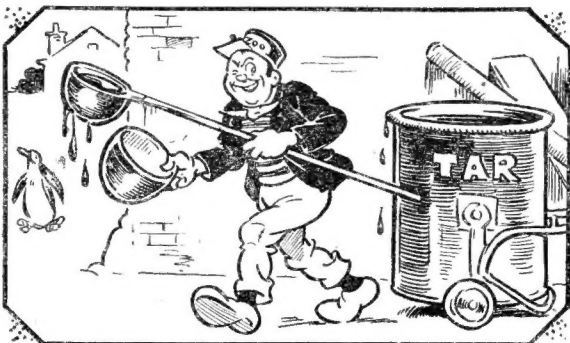
EASTER Holiday No. 1

EVERY MONDAY

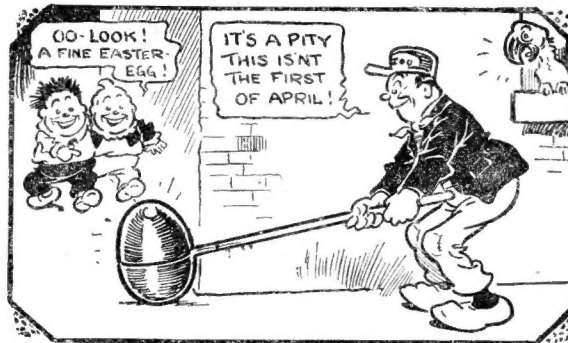
[No. 1772.] THE ADVENTURES OF JOLLY TOM, THE MERRY MENAGERIE MAN. [APRIL 26, 1924.]



1. Dear Mr. Editor.—Thank you for the Easter egg. Jackie and Sammy happened to see it arrive, and dashed forward to claim their share. "Run away!" I said. "Don't be greedy! Before I give you any Easter eggs I shall want to know who let the kangaroo out of his cage, and who tied false whiskers on the gazeeka."



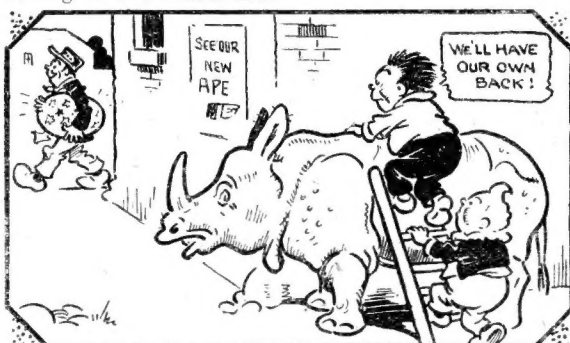
2. That's the way to talk to 'em, sir! "I must put a curb on their appetites," I think. "Those young gentlemen sadly need a lesson in self-restraint." So I turned out an old Easter egg-shell and placed it on top of a ladle filled with tar. "Now we'll have a little light comedy!" I think. "This ought to be as good as a cinema film."



3. Then I laid my little trap. Pushed that ladle just round a corner, where it was sure to catch the eye of the twins. "It's a pity this isn't the First of April!" I chuckled. "But any old time is joking time." The twins fell for it at once. "Oh, look! What a big Easter egg!" they cried. "Let's grab it before anyone else sees it!"



4. The young rascals came quickly forward, and both made a grab at the egg together. Just at that moment I gave the ladle an upward jerk. "You mustn't be greedy, boys!" I cried. "Tar, tar! You had better go and wash your faces now. Things are looking rather black for you this morning."



5. With that I picked up my real egg and went on my way rejoicing. "A nice Easter egg like this would find favour in the bright eyes of Clara, the cook," I thought. But the twins were not going to lose it without a struggle. They mounted the back of old Rhino and gave chase.



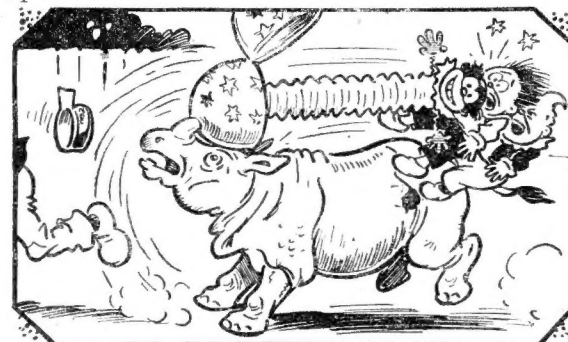
6. Soon they got Roddy going at the gallop, and the noise of his hoofs made me look round. "What's the game?" I thought. "That rhino is quiet enough as a rule." Then I caught sight of the twins on his back, and guessed they were up to mischief.



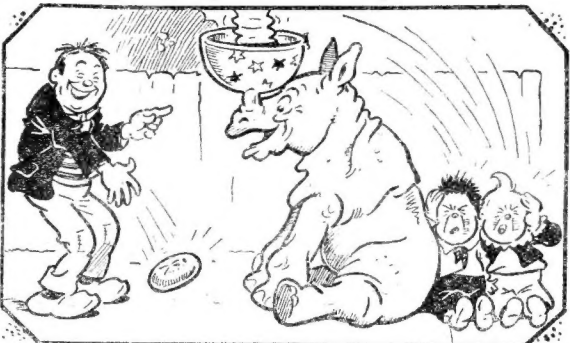
7. So I got a move on, Mr. Editor. But the faster I ran the faster Roddy ran, too. He had spotted a hot cross bun in my pocket, but I didn't know that at the time. All I knew was that I was getting very hot and cross myself.



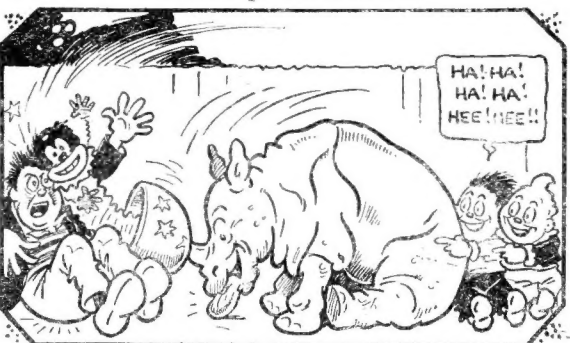
8. As a last resource I flung the egg behind me, in order to lighten the ship, as it were. Roddy caught it on his horn as he lowered his head. "That's good!" I thought. "He won't be able to hurt me quite so much now."



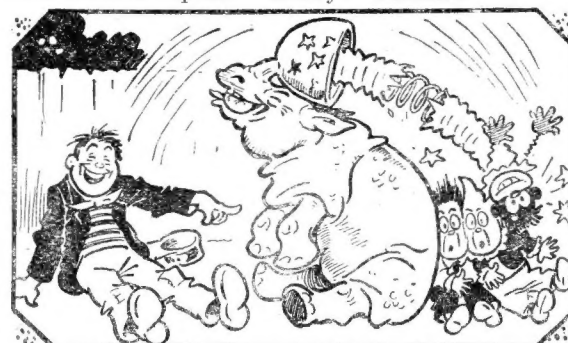
9. But as you know, sir, that egg was not full of chocolates! It contained a jolly old Jack-in-the-box with a strong spring, and as Roddy jerked up his head it shot out and gave the twins a sudden surprise. "Hooray!" I shouted.



10. "Ha, ha! You settled their hash nicely!" I remarked to Roddy as the noble animal sat down to take breath. "Good lad! Here's a bun for you. Don't swallow it all in one gulp. Masticate it well in order to fully enjoy the richness and fragrance of the aromatic spices." "Hark at him talking!" said Roddy.



11. Then he stooped down to pick up the bun, forgetting the Jack-in-the-box still sticking in his horn. I soon remembered it, though, for it caught me a crack on the canister that sent me sprawling. "Ha, ha!" laughed the twins. "Roddy has sprung a surprise on Uncle Tom! That's one to us at last!"



12. But as Roddy threw back his head to swallow the bun back went Jack, and the twins laughed on the other side of their faces! Well, good-day, Mr. Editor. It must be lovely on the front at Blackpool just now. I hope you are having a good time.—Yours,

JOLLY TOM.



THE RED ROVERS

OUR GREAT SPORTING STORY.

Telling of the adventures on and off the football field of Tom Armstrong and Terry Flanagan, the young stars of the great Red Rovers Club. Also of the mascots, William the monkey and Uncle Joe the parrot, and the jolly times in the Cosy Corner teashop kept by pretty Elsie Alison, Tom's sweetheart.

The Runaway Brake.

THE Rovers had arrived at a railway-station near a little seaside town where they were going to spend Easter. Some few miles away was the big city of Mancerton, and on Easter Monday afternoon the Rovers were playing a League fixture with Mancerton United.

A pair-horse brake had been sent to the station to meet them, and William had climbed up into the driver's seat. Then Uncle Joe accidentally startled the horses, and to the dismay of the driver and the Rovers, the animals bolted, with William trying to drive them, and Uncle Joe perched up beside him shouting with delight.

"Hi! Stop!" shouted the driver. But the frightened horses bolted round a bend in the road, disappearing from sight. "This is proper, ain't it, mate?" asked Uncle Joe, who was thoroughly enjoying himself.

William clung to the reins, making a harsh noise with his lips, which the horses seemed to understand as a signal for them to go faster.

They galloped along the road in great style, heading for the little seaside town, where a large fair had taken up its position on the beach.

The name of the town was Shellbeach, and it had a mayor and town councillors. Mr. Figg was the mayor, and he and the councillors had decided to honour the fair by visiting it in their robes, taking the town band with them to play them along.

Towards this procession raced the runaway brake, the rattle of the horses' hoofs being drowned by the strange noises made by the bandmen.

Most of them carried very large brass instruments which made deep bass noises of a nature that pleased Uncle Joe very much.

Striding at the head of the procession, fat little Mr. Figg thought he was looking very dignified, and that he was giving the girls a treat.

Then the runaway brake came whizzing round the corner, and the fun began.

"Stop at once!" shouted the mayor.

But the brake raced on, and Mr. Figg, the councillors, and the bandmen, all tried to get out of the way at the same time.

In a few moments the Shellbeach councillors and bandmen were well mixed. Hearing the galloping horses close behind him, Mr. Figg tried to run faster than he was able to, and he tripped over and shot forward.

He gave a very neat and praiseworthy performance as he took a header clean through the big drum, reminding some of the onlookers of the lady rider at the circus going through the paper hoop.

Unfortunately Mr. Figg's talented act was not very well finished, for he remained in the drum, his head stuck out on one side, and his legs on the other.

The big drummer, dazed by the sudden calamity, went on thumping lustily with his drum-sticks, hardly able to understand what was happening.

Close at hand a councillor sat in the mouth of a big brass trumpet, and became wedged in it, whilst another gentleman had one of these instruments tightly fixed over his head.

Through the litter of councillors, bandmen, and instruments, rocked the runaway brake, Uncle Joe having the time of his life.

"Ain't it proper, Billyum?" he shouted. "Look at dad with his brass 'at on!"

He was pointing to the bandman whose head was fixed in the big brass trumpet.

"Har, har, har!" Uncle Joe roared with laughter as he watched the mayor being thumped by the dazed big drummer.

"Look at that feller!" he shouted, pointing to the councillor who was sitting in the big brass trumpet. "What's he doin' in that?"

But the runaway brake went on too rapidly for Uncle Joe to enjoy the scene completely.

William still clung to the reins, but the horses now left the road, and went galloping over a sandy stretch, where some cinematograph actors were playing a scene supposed to be in the desert.

There was one actor at work at present. He was supposed to be lost in the desert with Indians riding towards them.

"Put some life into it!" shouted the producer. "Shout out you can see 'em coming! Look as though there's something to be scared about!"

The producer and the camera man had their backs to the road, and they did not see the runaway brake come on to the sandy stretch.

"Look out!" yelled the actor suddenly. "Mind! They're coming!"

"Fine!" exclaimed the producer, rubbing his hands. "That's a treat!"

"Look out!" screamed the actor again. "They'll be on to you in a moment!" "Splendid!" cried the producer. "You're acting just as though there is real danger. You're doing grand, old man!" "Don't you hear!" bawled the actor. "They're right on top of you!" "Isn't he doing—fine?" asked the producer, smiling with delight.

Thud! Biff! Bang! Bump! The runaway brake raced up behind the producer and the camera man, bumping about amongst the stage props.

Now the producer heard the muffled sound of the hoofs in the thick sand, and a second or so later he took a lovely header through a canvas scene showing distant mountains, whilst the camera man jumped fifteen yards to one side with his apparatus.

The runaway swept on, Uncle Joe laughing loudly. Then he looked back, and, to his astonishment, saw several people in the brake. They were odd actors, councillors, and bandmen who had caught hold of the runaway vehicle to avoid being knocked down by it. Then they had preferred to scramble into it rather than risk jumping off again.



The drummer went on thumping lustily.

"Allo!" exclaimed uncle. "It must 'ave been rainin'. Where did you lot come from? All fares, please! Havin' a good day, ain't we?"

When he listened to the replies he held one claw up and shook his head. "Oh, 'ush!" he exclaimed.

The horses had cut across to the road again, and now they found themselves not far from the hotel where they belonged. So they stopped bolting, and headed for home at a smart trot.

Outside the hotel stood the landlord and a number of local people, all eager to see the Rovers, and to welcome them.

"Here they come!" exclaimed the landlord. "Your husband is bringing them along in fine style, Mrs. Gubb!"

This remark was addressed to the wife of the driver of the brake, though, of course, that gentleman had been left behind at the station.

Nearer came the brake, and a cloud of cigarette smoke went up from William's lips.

"What!" cried Mrs. Gubb. "My 'usband smokin'! I'll give him somethin'! He knows the doctor 'as forbid it!"

The horses pulled up of their own accord outside the hotel, and the crowd stared at the well-dressed little gentleman who was driving.

"Lor, Mrs. Gubb!" exclaimed a lady. "How your husband has changed, to be sure! He's nicer-lookin' now, though, ain't he?"

"How do, everybody?" asked Uncle Joe cheerfully. "Here we are!"

The mixed collection of councillors, actors, and bandmen stood up in the brake, all of them talking together, and all of them using much the same words.

"Are these the Red Rovers?" asked a visitor to the hotel.

Before an answer could be given, another remarkable sight was seen.

The remains of the band and the mayor's procession had returned by a short cut, bringing their casualties with them. Mr. Figg's portly figure had become so firmly fixed in the big drum that he had to walk in it, wearing it something like a body-belt.

A councillor, with a brass trumpet instead of a head, was being led by two friends, whilst two other men were carrying a large brass instrument, in the mouth of which a bandman was seated, firmly wedged.

Joining the party which had climbed out of the brake, the newcomers also joined in the chorus, and used much the same words.

William and Uncle Joe sat up on the brake, thoroughly enjoying themselves.

"What's it mean?" gasped the landlord. "Where are the Red Rovers?"

At that moment the team appeared, for they had been fortunate enough to meet an empty charabanc which brought them along.

When they saw the crowd outside the hotel, including the gentlemen who were attired in musical instruments, the Rovers hardly knew whether to laugh or to try to look regretful.

"My word!" gasped Terry. "Uncle and Billyum have done it this time!"

"Yes, there will be a rare old row, I guess!" agreed Tom.

All the Fun of the Fair.

IT so happened, however, that the trouble was set right very quickly and easily.

The directors of Mancerton United had come along to welcome the Rovers, and they took charge of the proceedings. They said no one could be blamed for what had happened, but payment for damage done would be paid out of the proceeds of the match on Easter Monday afternoon.

By the time the gentlemen had been removed from the musical instruments, all was happy and peaceful again.

Easter Sunday was spent quietly and enjoyably by the Rovers, and on Bank Holiday morning they went along to the fair on the beach.

supports. But the latter shook violently, all the same, and off came a coconut.

"Ere, what's this?" shouted the owner, as William ran forward and picked up the second nut. "You never knocked that off!"

At that moment Uncle Joe crawled under the canvas screen at the back of the nuts and unhooked a long piece of stiff wire, the crooked end of which had been fixed round the bottom of one of the supports. Uncle had pushed it through from behind each time, and had pulled it when he saw William's ball coming along.

"Ready, mate?" he asked, as he crawled back under the screen.

But William was wise enough to see that the game was up, and he grabbed his two nuts and bolted furiously amidst loud yells of laughter.

The owner of the shy was not at all amused, however, and he dashed round in search of uncle, swinging a big stick.

"Cer-ummy!" gasped Uncle Joe when he saw the angry man. "So-long, mate!"

He went away after William, and the Rovers continued to laugh.

"You've got nothing to grumble at," said Terry to the angry owner. "You got two-and-two-pence for those two nuts, and you know they are fixed on so firmly that a fair shot won't knock one off."

The infuriated man moistened his dirty hands, glared round menacingly, had another look at the sturdy Rovers, and changed his mind suddenly.

"Bow! 'em up!" he gurgled, hardly able to speak for anger. "They're all milky!"

At that moment a crowd was seen to be forming some little way away, and, wondering what the matter was, the Rovers went across.

They found that Uncle Joe had managed to get hold of one of the coconuts and had pushed the point of his beak in to try to get the milk out. His beak had become fixed, and, resenting his friend trying to help himself, William, his coat off, was dancing round uncle, hitting him in different places.

Poor old uncle could not make a sound or get his beak free, but he managed to twist round suddenly so that William landed two hard punches on the coconut instead of on his friend.

There looked like being a lot of trouble now, but Terry went to uncle's assistance and managed to pacify the mascots so that they became friends again.

From show to show went the Rovers, thoroughly enjoying their morning's fun, Terry being greatly pleased because he won a sixpenny china vase at the dart-stall, though he forgot he spent two-and-threepence in doing it.

The Rovers v. Mancerton United.

THERE was an immense crowd at the Mancerton ground that afternoon. It was larger than usual because the Rovers had come there with an unbeaten record in the League. The local enthusiasts confidently expected the United to break this unbeaten record, for the Mancerton side was a powerful one, and had been beaten only once on their own ground.

They had lost this match early in the season, and did not mean to lose another if they could help it. Thus it was likely to be a battle of giants this afternoon, and the crowd expected a great game.

It was not disappointed, for both sides set to work to play fine football, and there was little to choose between them.

After five minutes' play honours were fairly easy, but then the United broke away suddenly, and a slanting shot went across almost along the goal-line.

Will Hunter had to fling himself at full length to keep it out, and all he could do was to push it round the post. He saw it actually cross the line, thus going out of play, but a second later it rolled back, and the Mancerton outside-right dashed in and passed to his centre, who had only to kick the ball into the net.

"Goal!" roared the crowd, whilst Will Hunter sprang to his feet and vigorously protested.

But the referee pointed to the centre of the field, he having not seen the ball just go over the goal-line.

"I saved it!" cried Will Hunter. "It's a corner, I tell you!"

He rushed out after the referee as he spoke, but was told to go back.

His eyes grew hot with anger and his fists clenched, but Tom ran up to him.

"It's no good, old man!" he said. "We believe you, but we have got to accept the referee's ruling. He thinks he is right."

Will returned and leant against a goalpost, staring moodily down the field.

The game was restarted, the Rovers getting away from the kick-off, Tom testing the Mancerton goalie with a hot one. But the home defenders rallied, and the ball went back to mid-field. There it stayed for some time, going backwards and forwards, neither goalie having anything to do.

At length the United front line got on the run again, and a terrific shot came in at close range. Will caught it, but staggered, bouncing the ball as he did so. But it rose sideways from the ground, and was actually across the line before Will could catch it again.

Angered at the bad luck, he booted the ball down the field and turned back into the net, the crowd behind the goal cheering loudly.

Then, to Will's surprise, he saw that the game was going on. A goal had not been given, though one had really been scored this time.

The crowd behind the net shouted themselves hoarse, booing and cat-calling until police had to come along and order them to keep quiet.

(Continued on page 6.)

WHERE BIG SHIPS GROW



A THRILLING NEW STORY OF BRITAIN'S SHIPYARDS. STARTING TO-DAY! By H. B. RICHMOND.

A False Friend!

A LONE! That was the plight in which Derrick Durham found himself as he wandered through the town of Steelport two days after his fourteenth birthday.

It was the early evening of what had been a soaking April day. The rain had ceased to fall now, and a damp mist was rising from the drenched pavements and roads; but Derrick Durham, who had been wandering aimlessly through the streets since the middle of the afternoon, seemed heedless of the clammy chill which was in the air.

Derrick was no weakling—for his age he was quite a sturdy built boy, although now his face was paler than usual, and his cheeks were wan and drawn.

But it was not a feeling of self-pity for his own loneliness which caused his lips to quiver and from time to time dimmed his brown eyes with tears.

Derrick Durham was thinking of his father who had that day been laid to rest in the cemetery three miles outside the big shipbuilding town of Steelport.

The lad had no remembrance of his mother, and his life with his father had not been very happy, yet Derrick's sympathetic nature had been stirred by the tragic illness that had cut short Martin Durham's life in the space of a few hours.

"Hallo, Derrick!"

Roused from his thoughts by the sound of his name, the boy turned sharply and saw that the speaker was Sam Hills, a riveter employed at Marsden's Shipyard, the great marine engineering works in which most of Steelport's sturdy sons toiled by day and night.

"I'm sorry to hear of your trouble, Derrick," said Sam in a kindly voice, as he walked alongside the boy. "You're but a youngster to be left on your own. It's only a few days since you left school, so you haven't had a chance to try and find your feet yet."

"It's a good thing I have finished with school, Sam," returned Derrick. "I shall be able to go to work now, and there might be a chance for me in the yards."

"That's right," agreed Sam. "No harm in trying, anyway, sonny, although it's only fair to tell you that you'd stand a better chance if you were a bit older and had a trade in your hands. Still, there's plenty of work at Marsden's just now, and you ought to be able to squeeze your way in."

"And then perhaps if I work hard at the Technical Night School I might be able to win an apprenticeship, Sam," went on Derrick eagerly. "Other boys have done it."

"And so would you if you set your mind to it," said Sam Hills encouragingly. "Are you going to stay on in that tumbledown old cottage by the creek, Derrick? It's a dismal sort of place for a boy to live in alone."

"I shall have to stay there," answered the lad. "It's been my home for years, and I think it belonged to dad."

"I'd give you a corner in my place if I could," said the good-natured Sam. "But, upon my word, I find my two little rooms a hard squeeze for my missus and two kiddies. Never mind, Derrick," he went on. "Keep your pecker up, there's better times ahead, you take it from me. So long!"

Derrick Durham and Sam Hills had arrived outside the open gates leading into Marsden's shipyard. Workers going on for the night-shift were streaming in through the gates, and after Sam had gone Derrick Durham paused to watch them.

Singly and in pairs the shipmakers passed in to carry on for the night the task of building the giant liner which lay, a skeleton frame, in the slips.

Platers, riveters, chippers, and drillers, blacksmiths, painters, and loaders walked through the gates together, to separate inside, each man to go to his own special task.

To Derrick Durham the sight of the shipyard even from the gates had always been a fascinating one.

In the far distance, lighted up by great flares, was the skeleton shape of the liner, with tall cranes and derricks rearing up on either side.

The braziers and flares, lurid and leaping in the mist, gave the vast yard an awesome appearance, lighting up the flat acres of open sheds, travelling cranes, rail trucks, and all the vast machinery of the great yard.

By day and night within this city of labour work continued unceasingly, and now as he

stood at the gates Derrick Durham was deafened by the sounds of continual hammering, mingled with the roll and crunch of machinery, the rattle of cranes, and the clang of plates thrown down by the workmen.

Derrick was thrilled by the sight as he had always been thrilled by it, for it was the greatest ambition of his life to become one of that vast army of men who, toiling at a thousand different tasks, helped to build up the great shapes which one day would ride like floating palaces upon the sea.

He turned away at last, and passing along by the high wall which bordered the shipyard he came to the big building which was devoted to the offices of Steelport's great industry.

He had just reached the main door that led to the building when a man stepped out.

He was a well-dressed man, with a pallid face, tiny black moustache, and sleek black hair turning grey at the temples.

he appeared to show in the fatherless boy's affairs, for he was not the type of man to concern himself with anybody's troubles but his own.

Derrick did not know this, and he naturally thought it very kind of one so important as the young master of the works to take any interest in him at all.

"Yes, sir, I am quite alone," he answered, "but, of course, I am old enough to work for myself now."

"That is a very proper spirit," agreed Stephen. "I hope it will meet with the success it deserves. I would help you to find some work if I could, but these matters are in the hands of the yard managers, so you had best apply to them if you hope to get taken on at the works."

"I thought of trying to-morrow morning," said Derrick.

"You mustn't expect too much," warned Stephen Marsden. "A vacancy may not occur



Without hesitating a moment Derrick vaulted in through the window.

Everybody in the town of Steelport knew Stephen Marsden, who would one day inherit the works of the great firm at present controlled by his uncle, Gregory Marsden.

Stephen Marsden looked down at the boy, and paused with a start as he recognised him. Then moving quickly down the steps he walked briskly past the lad.

Marsden did not appear to notice the boy, but as he stepped ahead he released his hold upon his walking-stick, and it dropped to the pavement almost at Derrick's feet.

The boy stooped quickly, picked it up, and handed it back to Marsden.

"Thank you, my lad—thank you!" exclaimed the man. "I'm much obliged to you, I'm sure. Are you one of the boys from the works?"

"No, sir," was Derrick's prompt answer. "But I am hoping to be," he added, for this chance meeting with the young master of the shipbuilding firm seemed too good an opportunity to be missed.

"That can't happen yet, I'm afraid," remarked Stephen. "As far as I know we have all the boys we want. Still, you're very young, and there is plenty of time. Have you a father or any brothers employed in the works?"

"No, sir. I haven't any brothers, and my father has just died," explained the boy, his voice just a trifle husky.

"Dear me, I am sorry to hear that!" exclaimed Stephen Marsden with an air of quiet sympathy. "What is your name?"

He asked the question with an air of mild interest, although, as a matter of fact, the answer was well known to him before he gave it.

"Derrick Durham, sir," returned the lad. "But surely you have not been left quite alone, my lad?" went on Stephen.

Those who knew Stephen Marsden intimately would have been surprised at the interest which

for days or even weeks, so I trust that your father has not left you entirely destitute. You have, I hope, enough money to carry on with."

"I—I don't know, sir," returned the boy. "My father didn't talk to me about anything like that, although just before he died he was able to speak a few words, which made me think that perhaps there might be something left for me."

"Oh!" ejaculated Stephen, casting a quick side glance at the boy. "What do you think he meant by that?"

Derrick hesitated a moment as he tried to recall the words which his father had said only a few minutes before death had claimed him.

"He told me to look in an old box which he has always kept at home," he said. "In the box he told me I should find something which would affect my future. What he meant by that I do not know, but I am going to look in the box as soon as I get home."

Derrick spoke frankly, for he did not think that there was any occasion for secrecy in the matter.

Stephen Marsden's grip tightened on his walking-stick, and his eyes seemed to flash as he heard the boy's words.

It was clear to him from what he had heard Derrick Durham had not yet examined the box left behind by his father, and it was this which Stephen Marsden had been trying to find out. "But if the contents of the box are liable to affect your future, why have you not examined it before?" asked Marsden, who could not understand why Derrick should have left such a matter unattended to.

"After dad died so suddenly I—I hadn't the heart to touch the box," returned Derrick. "I was very upset, and I thought no more about it until after I left the cemetery to-day. I shall open the box to-night of course, sir."

"Well and I hope that your father has left

you something more substantial than a few words of advice," Marsden remarked lightly. "Judging by your appearance, a square meal is what you want first of all. It is easy to see that you have not been properly fed since your father's death."

A flush came to the boy's cheeks, for Marsden's words were true enough. Derrick had had nothing at all to eat that day, for the only two shillings he possessed in the world he had spent that morning upon a small wreath.

"It seems to me," went on Marsden, "that you won't stand much chance of getting work in the yards until you have built yourself up a bit. There's no room for weaklings at Marsden's, you know. Here," he added, taking two half-crowns from his pocket, "you run straight away and get a proper meal."

Derrick Durham looked down at the two half-crowns and shook his head.

"It's very kind of you, sir, but I'd rather not take it," he said.

"Nonsense, nonsense!" retorted Stephen Marsden. "Silly pride won't fill an empty stomach, you know. Take this money at once, and if you find that your father has left any provision for you—well, you can pay me back."

It so happened that the man and the boy at this moment were passing a cookshop, and from the door there came an appetising smell which completely settled the matter for the hungry boy.

"Thank you, sir!" he said, a little huskily, for he was touched by the sympathy. "I am very grateful to you, and I hope I shall soon be able to pay you back."

"Don't let that trouble you," exclaimed Stephen breezily. "You dive straight into this shop and enjoy yourself. Good-night!"

He swung round as Derrick Durham raised his cap politely and walked into the cookshop.

Stephen Marsden glanced back in time to see the boy disappear. At once the carefully-assumed look of benevolence fell from this man's face like a mask.

"It was a bit of rare luck running into him the way I did," he muttered. "The boy knows nothing of the truth, and by Heaven he shall never know!"

He glanced at his watch. "He will be out of the way for half an hour at least," he said, "and that is time enough for all I want to do. I think I've had a good value for money to-night," he added, "for that five shillings I have given to young Master Durham will cost him a fortune and save me from utter ruin!"

The Stolen Secret.

IT was quite dark, and the damp mist was deepening as Derrick Durham picked his way over the untidy waste ground on which stood the tumbledown cottage which had been his home for so long as he could remember.

He was feeling better for the food he had eaten, and as he strode towards the house he fumbled in his pocket for the doorkey and some matches.

He was still twenty yards from the door when through the mist he caught a glimpse of light moving in the tiny ground floor room of the cottage.

The boy bounded forward instantly, for none knew better than he that the person in the room, whoever he might be, had no right to be there.

Coming nearer to the house he saw that the window of the room was wide open, and, making no sound as he crept forward, he went up to it and peered in.

The dark figure of a man was bending over a small tin box which he had drawn out from under the sofa.

"It's dad's box!" breathed the boy excitedly.

Without hesitating a moment Derrick vaulted in through the window and made a rush at the figure, which was just in the act of rising from the ground.

Derrick's action was plucky but hopeless, for although he succeeded in delivering one punch upon the body of the mysterious thief, the blow was returned with interest a second later, and Derrick Durham was swept off his feet by a swinging crack under the jaw.

The man, whose face was concealed in the shadow of a dark cap pulled down over his eyes, thrust a folded piece of paper into his pocket and darted to the window.

He was clambering out when Derrick scrambled to his feet and ran after him.

Derrick made one wild grab, and more by luck than judgment he succeeded in catching the man's left wrist. He held on grimly, and looking down saw that the back of the hand was marked with a slight but obvious scar.

The burglar wrenched his wrist free, then swinging round his right arm, he struck the boy on the side of the head with a force that once more bowled him clean off his feet.

The thief then waited for nothing more. At the top of his speed he darted across the waste ground, and before he had gone thirty paces he was lost to view in the mist.

Still running hard he reached the road, darted over a narrow bridge spanning the creek, and leapt into a motor-car which was waiting on the other side.

The driver of the car, whose face was concealed by a pair of heavy goggles, set the motor running immediately, and at the same time he turned to the man who had leapt into the seat by his side.

"Well?" he asked. "Have you got it?"

(Continued on page 6.)



Click

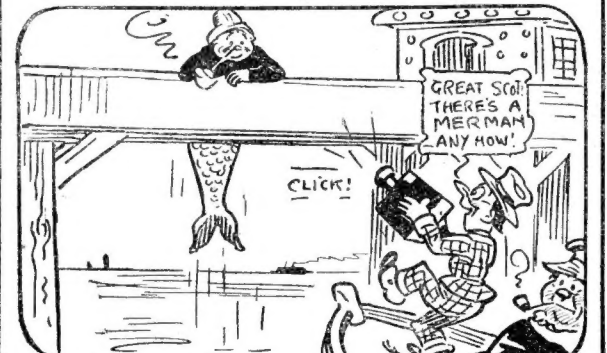
OUR SPORTING CAMERA MAN.



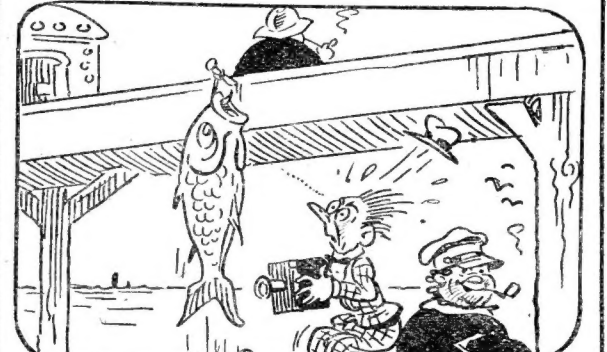
1. Our cheery little camera-man made a big resolve on Easter Monday. He would take a picture of a merry mermaid at Margate or fail in the attempt! So on the strength of a rather fishy yarn a boatman told him—



2. Click had sixpennyworth of joy-ride in the breezy old salt's rowing-boat and went out to explore the nasty—tut-tut!—the vasty deep. "Mebbe it's their day off, sir!" fibbed the old fossil when Charlie expressed his disappointment.

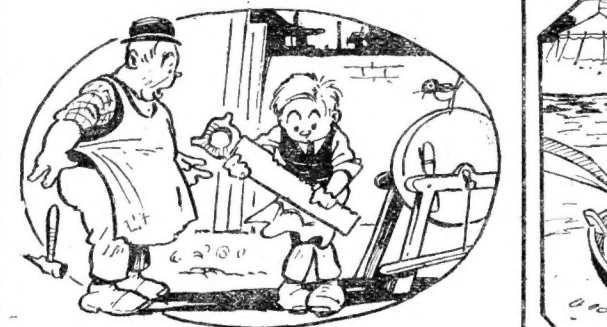


3. Then with a whoop of joy Click brought his camera up to the "present" and pulled the trigger. "Great Grimshy! There's a merman, anyhow!" he gasped. "Got him!"



4. But, alas! 'Twas only an optical illusion, after all, as poor old Charlie discovered on passing under the pier. What hard luck he does have, to be sure!

HE'D GROUND THAT TOO!



Pussyfoot

THE REDSKIN



1. Pussyfoot was smoking his pipe of peace on Easter Monday, when a couple of tourists, who had lost their way in the wood, strolled up. "Don't stand there like a scarecrow," snapped the man's fair companion. "Ask that Indian, he'll know the way to the hotel!"



2. "Guess that's a bright idea, my dear!" smiled Hiram Anised, making for the spot where Pussyfoot was resting. Then much to our Indian's surprise, he handed him—

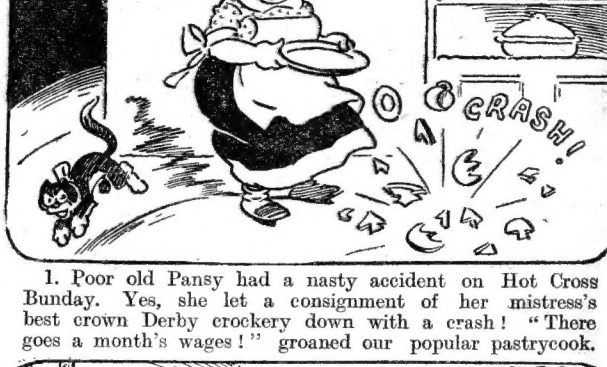


3. A crisp dollar note. "Say boy," drawled Hiram. "If anybody can put me wise, I guess you're the copper-coloured guy to do it. Now which road do I take to the hotel?"

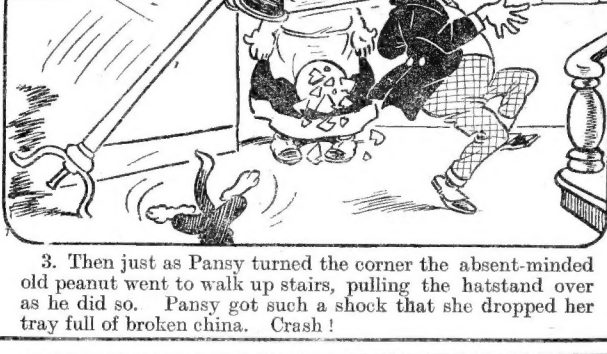


4. "Ugh!" granted our artful Indian hunter, jumping up and stuffing the note in his belt. "Read heap big sign!" Yes, Pussyfoot had been sitting in front of it all the time. Ha, ha!

PANSY PANCAKE



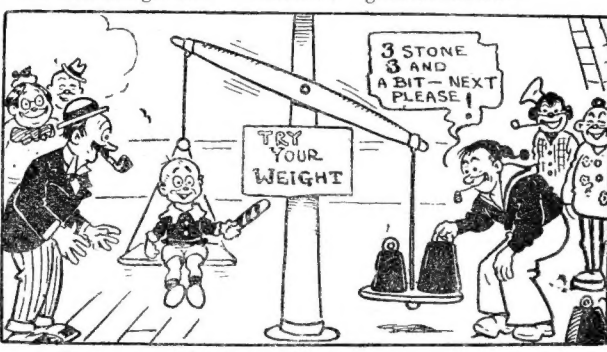
1. Poor old Pansy had a nasty accident on Hot Cross Bunday. Yes, she let a consignment of her mistress's best crown Derby crockery down with a crash! "There goes a month's wages!" groaned our popular pastrycook.



3. Then just as Pansy turned the corner the absent-minded old peanut went to walk up stairs, pulling the hatstand over as he did so. Pansy got such a shock that she dropped her tray full of broken china. Crash!



1. "Now mind you be good while I'm away, and see nobody runs off with the ship!" tootled Captain Cod on Easter Monday, as he hopped ashore and stepped it out briskly for the local fair-ground. "Gurr-r-r!" growled the crew.

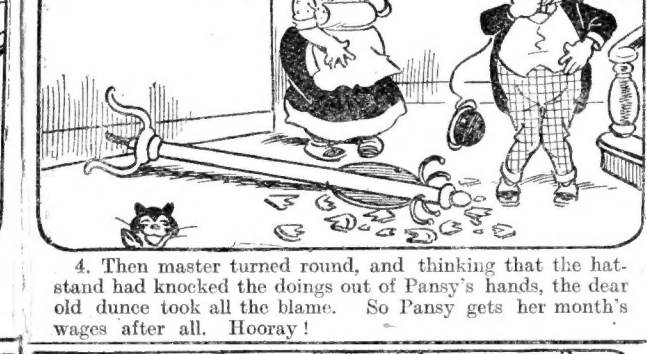


3. The merry and bright holiday crowd that trooped aboard voted it fine fun, and were so struck with the novel arrangements that they braced up handsomely. Tried everything they did, from the weighing machine—

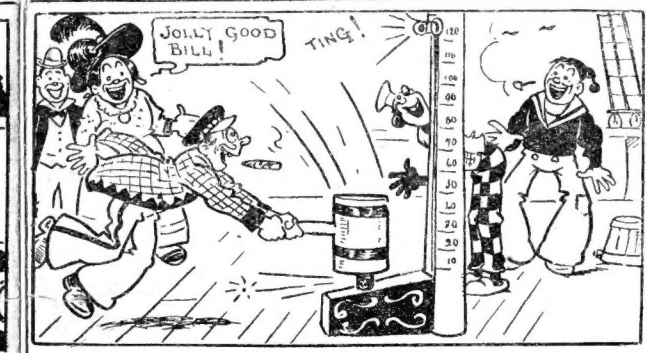
THE COMICAL COOK



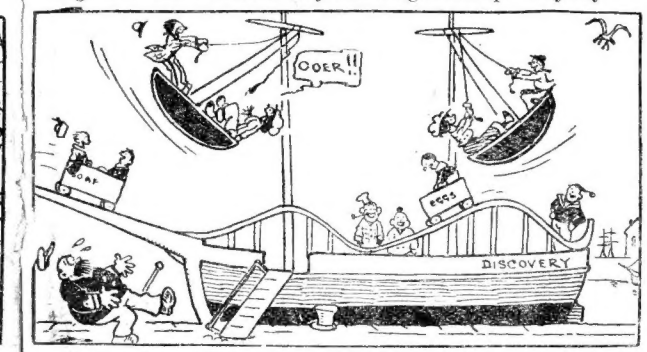
2. Having collected the bits and pieces, Pansy ambled along the corridor to report the disaster to Mrs. MacFreak. Meanwhile the master came in, and the silly old silly hung up his Lincoln and Bennet without removing his hat guard.



4. Then master turned round, and thinking that the hatstand had knocked the doings out of Pansy's hands, the dear old dunce took all the blame. So Pansy gets her month's wages after all. Hooray!



2. Then the bo'sun got a brilliant brainwave. "As we can't go ashore we'll have all the fun of the fair on board ship! Look alive there, me hearties!" And in about two wags of a whale's whisker they had things fixed up. Anyway—



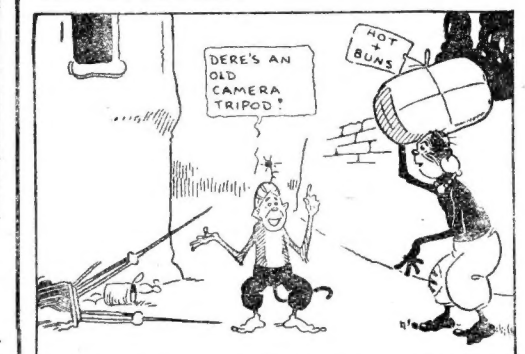
4. To the swings and switchback. The crew, of course, were soon rolling in money, so everybody was satisfied. That is, excepting the skipper. He fairly bit his whiskers with rage when he returned and saw the lively goings on.

CHUTNEY

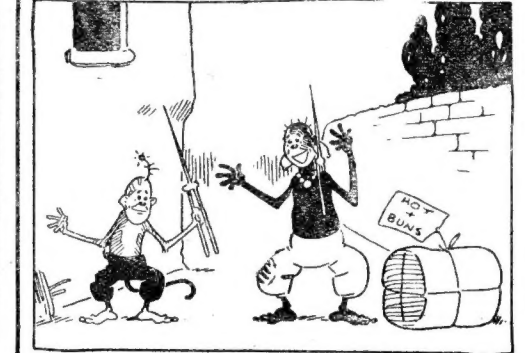
AND Mickey the Monkey Nut.



1. Chutney, the nig, is naturally very fond of hot cross buns, so far as eating them is concerned. But what he doesn't like is having to carry his Good Friday ration home from the bunnery. It makes his head ache!



2. Well, the other afternoon he was struggling along with his hefty bundle of buns when, on passing a rubbish heap, his pet monkey pointed to an old camera tripod. That did it!



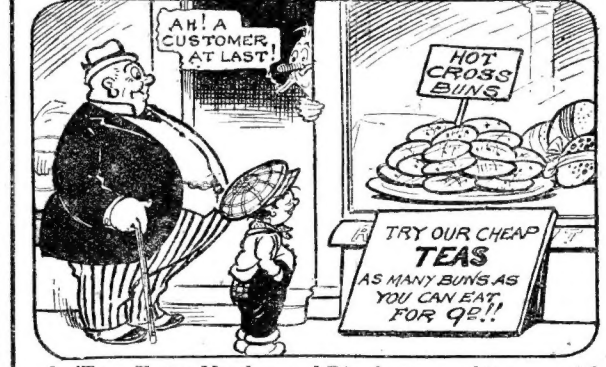
3. "Ah! Dat gives dis child de necessary ideah!" chortled the brainy black boy. "Jus give me de leg-up and me soon show yo' how to make a dinky parcel carrier!"



4. "Dere yo' am, ole son! How's dat for de tip-top ideah? Taken a great weight off me mind, it hab. Ha, ha!"

WADDLES

OUR WHIMSICAL WAITER.



1. 'Twas Easter Monday, and Rissolos was making a special feature of cheap teas with as many buns as you could eat for 9d. when up strolled a double-stout party.



2. "Ha, ha!" he chuckled. "That's the talk!" And in he went straight away and started operations. "We shall be ruined!" groaned Waddles, as the customer finished his thirty-fourth bun.



3. But at the forty-fifth bun, the fat man fell asleep, and then Waddles had a brain wave. He slipped outside, painted a chain on the window, and taking the board away—

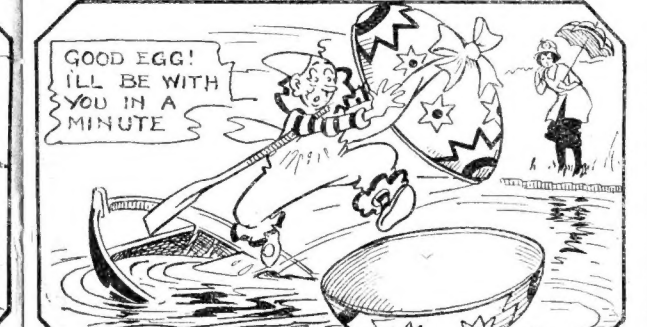


4. Painted this notice on the window instead. "Yes, he's very wild!" said Waddles, as the crowd assembled, and he passed round the hat. "My word, this is better than drawing the dols!" he chuckled. And when the customer awoke he couldn't make out what the crowd were staring at.

CHUCKLES, THE CLOWN, IS EGG-STRA SMART THIS WEEK.



2. Yes, the artful Sniggers bored a hole in the bottom of his boat. "Aha! I thought that would wreck his plans!" chuckled the villain as he watched the boat filling with water. "Now I can take Lucy for a stroll. Hee-hee!"



3. Just then, however, our old friend Chuckles rose to the occasion, and pulling the outside in Easter eggs in two, he launched them on the limpid stream and jumped aboard. "Good egg! Saved!" he cried.



4. To tie the two compartments together with the silk ribbon binding was the work of a few ticks, and away sailed Chuckles with the fair charmer, while Sniggers kicked chunks out of the towing-path with rage.

JIMMY'S LITTLE JOKE!



Visitor: "Is this old village very healthy?" Yoke! "Ba goom, it be that! Whoi, my grand-father died at 150!" Visitor: "Great Scott! 150?" Yoke! "Yes! 150, High Street!" 26-4-24

Sam's Silly Mistake!

All the Jokes of the Week in



By HAROLD BUBBLE and GUS SQUEAK.

GOOD-MORROW, old egg!"

"Good Friday, old bun! Gets late early nowadays, doesn't it?"

"Er—yes! Going anywhere on Easter Monday?"

"Yes. Old Blabb has promised to run me down to Brighton in his car."

"Well, I hope he keeps his word!"

"Why, does he often break it?"

"Yes. He stutters!"

"Ha, ha! Holidays are good for the buses and trams, aren't they?"

"Don't know so much. I think they lose more than they make."

"How so?"

"Well, y'see, the conductors give a ring with every ticket."

"That reminds me of a limerick I heard the other day. Like to hear it?"

"You bet! Trot it out!"

"There was a young lady named Farr,
Who caught the 3.3 to Forfar;
"For," said she, "I believe
That the 3.3 does leave
Far before the 4.4 for Forfar."

"Very good!"

"Well, if it's good, why don't you laugh?"

"I did! I laughed up my sleeve!"

"And why did you laugh up your sleeve?"

"Because that's where my funny bone is!"

"You've scored again. I went and heard Chellow, the violinist, play last night."

"What did you think of him?"

"Well, I certainly liked the way he put his instrument away! I've been to a lot of concerts lately, old lad!"

"Ah! Developing an ear for music?"

"No! I got this in a boxing-match!"

"Did you win?"

"Dunno! I was asleep when the other chap left the boxing-ring."

"Ha ha! What made you fight?"

"I was called upon to wipe a stain off our family name."

"Ah! I was called upon to do that when I was quite a youngster."

"You don't so say?"

"Sa fact! I had to clean our brass name-plate on the door every morning!"

"That reminds me. How far away are you living now, my old sparring partner?"

"About three miles away as the dust flies."

"What's your new address?"

"Iona Cottage."

"I know you do; but what's the name of the cottage?"

"Iona! Chump!"

"Then there's a pair of you!"

"Phew! Give over! You're a Londoner, aren't you?"

"Yes!"

"I thought so!"

"Why?"

"Because the history book says that the population of London is very dense."

"I've written a new book. Would you advise me to advertise it in the papers?"

"Rather!"

"Then you believe in the success of advertising, old fellow?"

"I should say yes! I advertised last week that the fellow who stole my watch could keep it, and he's done so. Isn't that successful?"

"Very much so! Well, I can't stop. I've got to make my little nephew a fishing-net."

"And how do you make a fishing-net?"

"Oh, you just tie a lot of little holes together with strings!"

"I see; as simple as yourself. So long!"

Cup Final Number

Out Wed., Apr. 23rd.

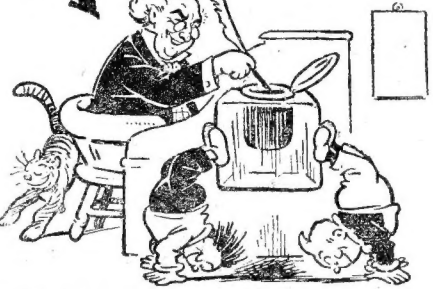
Special Features Include

TAKING HOME THE TROPHY and GOALS THAT WON THE CUP

Make sure of this week's

FOOTBALL FAVOURITE

Mr Comic Cuts' Chat



COMIC CUTS Office, 166, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4.

DEAR COMIC CUTLETS,—First of all I must wish you a happy hot cross bun day and a jolly Easter Monday. May you all be full of bun and fun.

Of course, all COMIC CUTS readers are always merry and bright but if you should know of any poor fellow who is not in the habit of wearing a smile, just tell him to get this Easter Holiday number of COMIC CUTS, and his troubles will vanish like chocolate eggs before a hungry boy.

I hope that you have read and enjoyed the first instalment of

"WHERE BIG SHIPS GROW,"

the new shipbuilding story which commences in this issue. The next instalment will be even more exciting than the first, so you must make quite certain of following the exciting adventures of Derrick Durham.

Since writing the opening paragraphs of this Chat, I have been out to lunch, and I haven't

WHERE BIG SHIPS GROW.

(Continued from page 3.)

The voice which asked the question was tense and harsh, and scarcely recognisable as that of Stephen Marsden; but Marsden's voice it was.

"Yes, I've got it!" was the answer to Marsden. "But I wasn't a second too soon. The kid himself came in just as I was looking at the paper."

"And what is it, Pike?" demanded Marsden. "Has old Martin Durham betrayed me?"

"It's as bad as it can be," returned Pike, drawing from the pocket the paper which he had thrust there. "I only had a chance to read the first few words, but there's no doubt that this letter would have given your game away."

"Turn on your light and let me see it," commanded Stephen anxiously.

His companion unfolded the paper and flashed the light of his electric torch upon it.

The car was travelling at a fair speed as Stephen Marsden, still gripping the wheel, glanced down at the paper. Quickly his keen eyes scanned the message, and as he read it he realised how very nearly the whole of his hopes and ambitions had been ruined.

The message, written in a bold, clear hand, read as follows:

"My dear Derrick,—I am writing this letter, and am placing it among my own property in my tin box, so that it may be opened by you and read in the event of anything happening to me. It deals with a secret which I could not divulge as long as I lived. When you have read of the wrong which I have done you, I pray you will not think too hardly of me. Perhaps if you knew the whole truth you would even find it possible to forgive me."

"You are not really my son, Derrick, for when only a few weeks old you were stolen from your parents, given into my care, and since then I have been forced to bring you up as my own boy. I make no excuses for my share of the plot which has cheated you of your true rights, but it is true that I have never taken a penny of money for the task which was forced upon me."

THE RED ROVERS.

(Continued from page 2.)

But every now and again they broke out during the first half, saying that the United were two up instead of one up.

Half-time came with no addition to the score, and during the interval Will told his comrades that the crowd was right.

"Still, it makes up for the first," he said. "That was a corner, not a goal!"

In the second half the crowd went nearly mad with excitement, so thrilling was the game. Time after time the goals had narrow escapes, but the United still kept their lead of one goal.

It was getting very near to time, and the Rovers' unbeaten record looked like going by the board. Then Tom got away, and he banged in a shot which hit the cross-bar. Out came the ball, and a back turned and trapped it.

recovered from it yet. I tried a new place, and really the food was the worst I've ever come across. I was doing my best to get over it when the waiter came along to make up my bill.

"Did you have tomato soup or pea soup, sir?" he asked.

"Goodness knows!" I replied. "It tasted like soapy water to me!"

"Ah!" said the waiter. "That was tomato soup, sir. The pea soup tastes like paraffin!"

When you have read through this number no doubt you will be looking for another paper to help cheer you over the holidays. I really don't think you could do better than buy "Comic Life," the well-known and deservedly popular coloured paper.

This week's issue, which is now on sale, is a special Easter Number, and contains a fine programme of stories, including the opening chapters of a new serial called:

"THE SCHOOL OF SECRETS!"

This tale is really a splendid novelty in the way of stories, and is full of fun and most exciting adventure. Of one thing I am very certain, and that is that all who read the first long instalment will read to the very end of the story.

There are many other stories in "Comic Life" this week, including a long complete tale of Dick, Dan, and Darkie, three rollicking and daring adventurers; a complete story of Trooper Tom Terry, of the Mounted Police; a splendid tale of Strongheart, the Young Indian Chief; and other complete stories and serials.

Your friend,

CLARENCE CUTS.

"But now death has set me free of a bondage of fear, and I now make the truth known to you and to the world. You are not the penniless orphan of Martin Durham, for you are really the son and rightful heir to Gregory Marsden, owner of the Steelport Shipyards."

"Take this letter to Mr. Marsden, and tell him that he will find proofs of your true identity hidden in—"

Stephen Marsden had reached this point in the message, when overcome by eagerness to read the all important words contained in the last lines, he leaned down more closely over the paper.

At that moment the whole of Stephen Marsden's attention was occupied by the message, and he seemed for the space of a few seconds to have forgotten that he was in charge of a car which was travelling at a fast speed through a deepening mist.

"Look out!" cried Pike suddenly. "We must be near the river, and the bridge across it is narrow."

Marsden looked up just in time to see that the car was swerving to the left of the road which ran up on to the bridge.

Looking up from the letter, he gripped the wheel, and stared ahead to try and pierce the gloom.

At the same moment the car ran down into a dip, and too late Marsden realised that the car had left the road and had run down the steep slope leading to the river bank.

"Pull up—pull up, you fool!" cried Pike in alarm. "We shall be in the river!"

Marsden jammed on the brakes, and this only hastened the disaster, for the car skidded sideways and shot out from the bank into the swift-running waters of the river.

Both men were flung out into the stream, and, after sinking deep beneath the surface, rose, gasping, to the misty night air.

Pike was still holding in his grip the precious paper, but in his fear for his own life he relaxed his grasp upon the sheet.

As it went floating away he remembered its value, and he made a grab at it.

He missed it by inches, and as he struggled frantically to prevent himself from sinking the paper was carried away out of his sight.

(Be sure to follow the further adventures of Derrick Durham in this great new story of shipyard life.)

Terry went into him on the run, and the pair of them rolled over, the ball trickling towards Tom.

"Foul!" shouted the crowd. But Tom slammed in a terrific shot at the same time, and the ball crashed into the net.

"Foul!" roared the crowd again, though Terry's charge had been a fair one.

Then the spectators down at the other end started shouting that the United had scored two goals, not one.

The players lined up amidst intense excitement, whilst the two sections of the crowd booed the referee for different reasons, saying the Rovers had bought him.

Then the whistle went for time, with the result a draw of one goal each, which was a very accurate index to the game. Each side had scored one fair goal, and the play had been very level.

Suddenly the crowd came pouring on to the ground, shouting that the United had really won, and an ugly rush was made towards the referee, who started to sprint off the field.

(To be continued.)



NOW look ear, Ginger, my lad," sed the boss in stern but kindly toans the uther day. "I want to give the readers ov COMIC CUTS Easter Number the finest feest ov fun they've ever had."

"And the same ear, wiv bells on, if i may say so, ser!" i exclaimed. "You kan rely on me to do my very utmost to make it a suck-sess. I think you have allways fownd me willin, ser?"

"Yes, willin to let uther people do yor wurk!" remarked the Old Man dryly. "But that's not ear nor there, as the munkey sed wen he dropped his lunch over the kliff. I want you to rite a kollum ov chat on a very absorbint subjeck this week."

"Blottin paper, ser?" i sergestid. "No. Easter!" said the boss, tryin hard not to laff. "You know the sort ov stuff our readers like? Sum witty joaks on buns, & mind they're not stale."

"He gave vent to a chuckle to let me no he'd made a pun, & thinkin i had wurked him up into a good mood, i mermered:

"But how kan i rite on Hot Kross Buns wen i haven't had any this year yet?"

"Hevings, boy! Don't you remember anything that appened to you last Good Fryday?" he kride.

"Hevings! Do i not?"

For weaks & weaks i had been lookin forward to my annewel blow-out ov hot kross buns, & so wen my gerl, Tilda Tabbs, invited me to her place for a bun skramble, my joy was like a kangaroo wiv the roomatizum—it new no bounds!

But alarse! She took the gilt off the gingerbread—or p'raps i ort to say, the shine off the buns—wiv her next remark.

"Promise me that you won't taist a single hot kross bun till you've tride the wuns i'm goin to make, Sebastian!" she kride.

"Hay? Wot's that? Do you think you ort to do such heavy wurk, Tilda?" i asked. Then,



Gently but firmly I pushed back the plate.

secin a look ov pain flash akross her marble brow, i mermered in toans as tender as a bit ov boiled cowheel:

"All rite, my luv. I promise!"

And my promises, i mite menshun, are not like Easter egg shells. They're not made to be broken.

Therefour, at brekfast the next mornin i remained trew to my trust, & gently but firmly i pushed back the plate ov hot kross buns wiv my muther placed in frunt ov me.

Then before my ma kood rekuvver from the shock, i slipped into my hat & coat & dashed round to Tilda's house, full ov eagerness & a space large enuf to akkomodate 2 duzen buns in kumfort.

But har! I was doomed to taist ov the bitter kup ov hunger, for my fasko greetid me wiv "Ullo, Ginger! Wot do you want?"

"Sum buns, my luv!" i kride. "Leed me to them!"

"Wot?" she exclaimed, in toans ov ringin skorn. "Do you think i'd soil my dainty fingers to fill yor pantry wiv buns arter wot you sed yesterday?"

And wiv that she slammed the dore in my face.

In vain i pleedid wiv her threw the letter box, & wiv an empty feelin in the region ov my waistbelt i terned & ran back to my own home.

But fate was indeed against me, for even as i entered the kitchen my father's teeth met in the larst hot kross bun.

"Well, that takes the bun!" i gasped, as i kollapsed into the nearest chare, & there & then i resolved never to refuse a home to a hot kross bun agane.

How many am i going to have on Fryday? Har! You'd laff if you new. At eny rate, if you each have arf as meny as i've ordered you'll have a high old time ov it.

Happy Easter evrybody!

Trewly yours,
GINGER.

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY... PRICE 2

26-4-24.

The Call of Adventure

Being the tale of the many stirring and amusing adventures of Vic Martin, Billy Blewitt, and all the other cowboys at the "Flying A" Ranch.

Billy Blewitt Gets to Work.

FOR some moments there was silence on the veranda which fronted the ranch-house of the Flying A, as the sheriff arrested Vic Martin.

A silence so tense and dramatic that anything might have happened.

It was broken, however, by Spot Dawson, the ranch foreman, and Spot dropped his gnarled strong hand on the wrist of the sheriff, and with a quick action dragged him away from Vic Martin, who stood white and bewildered as the true meaning of the awful charge sank into him.

"Just a moment, sheriff," said Spot Dawson grimly. "You're in a mighty hurry to arrest this lad. You say that he was seen to deliberately shoot this greaser Guerrile in the back, and that the man that saw him, and passed on the information to you, was another greaser, Alvarez? Waal, there's two things I want to know before I'm satisfied that you've got the right man. One of 'em is this. What's the motive for this shooting? Why should one of my lads want to shoot a greaser? Can you explain that?"

The sheriff's eyes narrowed. "There ain't no call for me to answer to you, Spot Dawson," he said. "I'm sheriff of this county, and I answer only to the judge and the State. However, if you give me your word that none of your boys will obstruct me in carrying out my duty I'll answer any questions you like to put. The motive, as I get it, was revenge. This greaser Guerrile once struck young Martin, and the boy swore to get him for it."

"It's a lie!" said Vic heatedly. "I've never seen Guerrile in my life! I shouldn't know him if I saw him, and—"

"Where'd you get that piece of evidence, sheriff?" asked Spot suddenly.

"From the same source as where I got the general information of the shooting—from Fernando Alvarez," replied the sheriff quietly.

"All of which brings me to my second question," said Spot. "Where is this Fernando Alvarez now? Why hasn't he got pluck enough to come up here and stand by the charges he's made? Why didn't you hold him as your principal witness?"

"Fernando is where I can get him at any time," said the sheriff. "He warned me that you and the Flying A boys might attempt to do him some injury when you heard the charge, and I've told him to light out for the hills and lay low until I want him for the court case. Till then you won't see Fernando Alvarez, my friend."

"Snakes! If I could only find him I'd wring the truth out of him before wringing his dirty neck!" said Spot. "It's a tissue of lies from start to finish, and I for one ain't going to let young Martin be carted off to the gaol on such flimsy evidence!"

The sheriff looked up mildly. "You'll be obstructing the law if you butt in," he said. "There ain't no use for you and me to quarrel, Spot. I got my duty to do, and—"

"Listen a moment, please!"

It was Vic Martin himself who spoke, and he turned his eyes pleadingly on Spot Dawson.

"It won't do any good for you to prevent my arrest, Spot," said Vic quietly. "That will only get you and the Flying A in trouble. I'm innocent of this—this awful charge, and I'm not afraid to meet the judge in court and account for my movements. Let me go with the sheriff, whilst you and Billy and any of the boys that are able to be spared hunt up anything which will prove that I am telling the truth. Myself, I suspect this Mexican, Alvarez, for, you remember, he swore vengeance on me for winning the buck-jumping contest. If only you could find Alvarez and make him tell the truth the whole mystery would be cleared up."

"You'll see Alvarez soon enough—in the court," said the sheriff dryly. "Till then I reckon you needn't waste time trying to find him."

Spot Dawson considered for a moment. Then he nodded his head slowly.

"You're right, Vic!" he said. "We don't want any trouble with the law. Sheriff, take him away and look after him properly, or you'll have to answer to me for it. Meanwhile, we'll all get scouring around, Vic, and you can trust us to search out the truth before the time for your trial arrives. Good-bye, old son!"

The foreman shook hands firmly and turned away. Billy Blewitt clutched his chum's arm and spoke in a voice that shook with emotion.

"Vic," he said, "I'll stick by you! I don't care what anybody else says. You're my chum, and I'll stick by you till the end."

Vic smiled and shook hands.

"Billy," he said, "I'm sorry we've been having words lately. Soon you'll know all about everything, and then—"



Luck seemed to desert Billy then for his horse slid on the rolling boulders.

"Come on!" said the sheriff testily. "We've wasted enough time already. I want to get to the town this afternoon."

With a final handshake Vic was led away, and soon the sheriff and his young prisoner was fast disappearing in a cloud of dust.

When they were gone Spot turned to the cowboys and called them round him.

"We've got to get that greaser!" he said slowly. "And we've got to get him alive, and make him spill the beans as to the truth o' this. You're all in this. Find Alvarez, and I'll put up a twenty buck reward!"

"We sure don't want no reward, Spot," said old Tex Rich, who had been friends with the two boys since their arrival on the Flying A. "All we wants is common justice. Ain't that so, boys?"

There was a chorus of assent, and Spot waved them away.

"I ain't got no further orders for you except those," he said. "Bring Fernando Alvarez here, and I'll get the truth out of him somehow."

The boys separated and went about their daily tasks. Billy, who was off duty, made his way to the bunk-house to consider some plan of action on his own.

He was worried and puzzled a good deal, for he knew much more about his chum's movements than did the sheriff or Spot Dawson.

He knew, for instance, that Vic had been riding out half-way to the Mackenzie Ranch, and that there he had met Madge Mackenzie. He also knew that this had happened not once only but several times.

The thought of this galled him a good deal, for Vic knew that Billy adored Madge Mackenzie, and the idea that his chum appeared to be trying to "cut him out" hurt considerably.

But that wasn't the point at the moment. The main thing was that Vic was under a cloud, and that cloud had got to be cleared away, and Billy's thoughts reverted to the brown paper parcel which Vic had returned to camp with, and which Billy had seen him hide under the mattresses of his bunk.

It was a brown paper parcel that the sheriff said had been stolen from the dead Mexican, Phillip Guerrile.

Was it possible, thought Billy, that Vic had stolen this parcel? Was it possible that there had been a quarrel, and in the heat of the moment Vic had drawn his gun and—

Then Billy remembered that the Mexican had been shot in the back and he knew that, whatever else happened, Vic could never be guilty of a cowardly action like that.

He might conceivably have fired the fatal shot in an angry argument, or perhaps in a struggle, or in self-defence, but that Vic would coolly shoot any man—enemy or not—in the back was absolutely beyond believing.

But that parcel!

Had it or had it not belonged to Guerrile? A lot depended on that, and Billy felt that should that parcel be found beneath Vic's mattresses it would certainly seal his chum's fate.

Therefore the best thing to be done was to destroy it—get rid of it immediately, and remove all trace of it ever having been near Vic's bunk.

Billy rose from the edge of his own bunk and walked silently over to the one where Vic usually slept.

The bunk-house was empty, and there was no fear of him being disturbed.

Quickly he rolled back the mattresses, and then, with a hasty glance round, stooped quickly.

Yes. The parcel was still there, just as Vic had left it!

Quickly Billy seized it and thrust it into his shirt, and, replacing the mattress, hurried from the bunk-house and round to the corral where he kept his horse.

A few minutes later he was riding from the ranch-house to some lonely spot where he could dispose of the parcel.

He reached a thicket of cottonwoods, and, dismounting, made his way to a shady spot beneath the trees. Then slowly he drew the parcel from his pocket and as slowly unwrapped the brown paper.

He gave a start as he saw the contents—a pair of six-shooters with delicately-chased silver butts, and a new cowboy neckerchief.

For some moments he gazed at the things in silence. Surely no Mexican was worth shooting for the sake of these?

Then Billy's eyes caught sight of a note stuck in the barrel of one of the guns, and slowly he drew it out and unfolded it.

Then he started violently. The note was addressed to Billy himself!

"Dear Billy,—Me and Bud send you the enclosed shooting-irons as a present on your eighteenth birthday, and as a souvenir of the fight you put up against the Reds last month. Madge ain't included in this—she's sending something of her own—something which she's made herself. Yours respectfully,

"PA MACKENZIE."

Billy's heart beat rapidly as he turned to the silken neckerchief and picked it up reverently. To this a note was also pinned, and with trembling fingers Billy opened it.

"To Billy, with many happy returns, from Madge."

For a moment the boy looked at the note with misty eyes, and then, with a wild whoop, he jumped to his feet and galloped back to the ranch faster than he had ever ridden in his life before.

He knew now why Vic had kept his visits to Madge a secret. It was to make these surprise birthday gifts a veritable surprise indeed, and the thoughts that his chum was trying to "cut him out" were gone for ever.

Moreover, there was a chance that Madge Mackenzie might throw some light on the mystery of the shot Mexican, and at last Billy could get busy on the task of clearing his friend.

On The Track.

BILLY'S first thought on reaching the ranch was to convey his news to Spot Dawson; but on second thoughts he decided to keep the matter secret for a little longer, for in truth it had no real bearing on the shooting of Phillip Guerrile.

So Billy kept his news to himself, overjoyed in the knowledge that Vic's secret meetings with Madge Mackenzie had been but a means of giving him these surprise birthday-presents.

True, through the circumstances of Vic's arrest, Billy had got his presents a week before his birthday, and when he thought of that it reminded him that Vic had told him he was going out again on his own on the following week.

It was clear to Billy that his chum was to see Madge yet once again in connection with these presents, for the very day upon which Vic had arranged to go out riding on his own was Billy's birthday.

So Billy decided to keep the appointment himself, as Vic was unable to be present, and, meanwhile, he devoted himself like the rest of the boys of the Flying A to trying to discover traces of the man Alvarez, and to make him tell the truth concerning this mystery which clouded Vic's name.

But though every conceivable trail in the neighbourhood was followed up, there was no clue to the hiding-place of the Mexican; and as the day for Vic's trial drew nearer it looked as if it would be an impossibility to produce the Mexican until he appeared in court to give his false evidence.

But just at the last minute one important piece of evidence did come to light—so Spot therefore was forced to ride into town himself with his evidence.

The sheriff eyed him closely as Spot strode

into his office, fearing perhaps that the cowboy foreman had come to take Vic away forcibly.

But Spot soon put him at his ease.

"What brings me to you, sheriff," he said, "is a piece of news which only came to light this morning, and on the strength of it I've reconstructed the shooting business and made it look more feasible. Listen! This greaser Alvarez was in a bucking contest along of Vic Martin and the boys. Alvarez got badly thrown in that contest which Vic won, and, in fact, Vic made him look like nothing on earth when it came to riding. I might say that Vic made me look the same, but that ain't neither here nor there. Anyway, we can take it for granted that Alvarez, being a Mexican, swore revenge. Now, how was he to get the boy into his clutches? He thought about coolly shooting him, say; but at the last moment he remembered that you, sheriff, are pretty slick at tracing a man by the bullets he uses. So he started in to think, and at last he got it! He got hold of a gun owned by Vic Martin, see! Then he induced another greaser whom he didn't love any to come out on the Mackenzie trail with him. There, from behind a rock, he coolly shot this greaser, leaving the gun he had stolen by the man's side, and coming to you with the information! How's that go for fixing the job on Alvarez?"

"Sounds feasible," muttered the sheriff. "But there's things you've got to prove. How can you prove Alvarez stole that gun? And what about the brown-paper parcel that Guerrile was robbed of?"

"I don't know about the parcel," said Spot. "But I can prove Alvarez stole that gun! You've heard that Vic lost his gun somewhere a week or so ago. Well, none of us thought about it, but on that self-same day this greaser Alvarez called at the Flying A for food and water for his boss. Of course he got it—and he stole that gun then. He stole it from its holster whilst Vic Martin was sluicing at the pump. Woo Tan, our Chink cook, saw him do it!"

"Then why in the name of all rattlesnakes didn't Woo Tan say so?" said the sheriff in disgust.

"Woo Tan is a Chink," said Spot, "and you know what that means. He saw the theft, and calmly went to the Mexican for money to keep his mouth shut. Alvarez gave him twenty dollars in two notes!"

"Why is the Chink sorry now?" asked the sheriff. "First time I've ever heard of a Chink going back on a bargain like that."

"There's two reasons," said Spot. "One, Vic Martin has been good to Woo Tan, and the Chink didn't quite see where this was going to end. He just thought that Alvarez wanted the gun and took this way of getting it. True, Woo Tan was startled to get so much cash for keeping mum; but that brings me to my second reason—the notes was bad! The Chink naturally up and told all he knew then!"

The sheriff was silent for a moment, thinking deeply.

"It certainly seems that there's a case here," he said. "However, we'd better let things go on as they are. If Alvarez gets wind of what we're on to he'll never show up here again. If we keep mum he'll come in for the trial, and I can nab him then. It ain't any use looking for him; he's got a hide-out up in the hills that can't be got at, so I'm told."

So, although Spot had had hopes of taking Vic back to the ranch with him, he saw that the sheriff's plan was the best, and after leaving a cheery message for Vic he returned to the Flying A.

Meanwhile, Billy Blewitt was fast nearing the spot where he hoped to meet Madge Mackenzie. By now he was almost beside the big rock from which he had seen Vic meet the girl the previous week, and, sure enough, as he looked down into the canyon and followed the trail up the next hillside with his eyes he caught sight of a rider coming cautiously down to the meeting-place.

And then out of a little-used trail he saw the figure of another horseman, a figure in a tall, straw, cone-shaped hat—a figure that he knew at once to be that of a Mexican.

With anxious eyes he rode onward, keeping a good look-out on Madge, whom he was certain was the other rider on the trail.

But less than a mile away Billy saw Madge and the Mexican meet. He spurred his horse, fearing danger, and then echoing across the canyon came a shrill, girlish scream.

The blood in Billy seemed suddenly to turn to ice. Never before had he heard a woman scream like that, and he realised that Madge was in some dire peril.

He strained his eyes as he galloped recklessly down the trail, sending showers of stones and small boulders along in front of him. He saw Madge Mackenzie struggling in the Mexican's grip, and heard her scream again.

In a frenzy he urged his horse at a dangerous speed down the sloping trail, hoping and praying that he would reach the girl's side in time to give her aid.

And then the luck seemed to suddenly desert him. His horse trod on one of the small rolling boulders, and slid heavily to the ground. Billy was flung headlong from the saddle, and, rolling over and over in a cloud of throat-parching dust, reached the bottom of the hill bruised and dazed.

And when he looked up the opposite hill he found that Madge Mackenzie and her Mexican attacker had gone, leaving no trace behind them!

(To be continued in a rousing instalment next week.)

COMICAL CAPERS IN COMIC CUTS COLONY

